

**Minutes**  
**SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM TASK FORCE**  
**March 15, 2005 7:00 - 10:00 p.m.**  
**Group Decision Support Center, Pennino Building**

**Approved 3-29-05**

**Members Present:** Joyce Bissonette, Marilyn Blois, Clark Tyler, Sheila Roit, William Lecos, Jim Langemeier, Joan Carr, John Hasel, Joyce Doughty, Conrad Mehan, Paul Liberty

**Member Absent:** Phil Auld, Robin Smyers, Queenie Cox, Joanne McCoy

**Facilitator:** JR Holt, JRH Associates, Inc.

**Guests:** Chuck Minor

**County staff:** Jeff Smithberger, Marilyn McHugh, Linda Boone, Pamela Gratton

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m., when a quorum was present. During discussion of the minutes, a member questioned whether the Task Force affirmed its decision not to have recommendations in the report that were simply recommendations to continue the status quo. Members confirmed that the report would reflect only the discussion about the topic and various issues that were identified, but would not include recommendations that merely support the status quo. The minutes were then approved as presented.

There was no need to have instruction on the use of GDSC since all the attendees were familiar with the software. A copy of the GDSC Report of March 15, 2005 is attached as part of these minutes.

**Yard Waste Collection**

A member of the task force, who is a collector, asked to have a discussion of issues surrounding the need for separate collection of yard waste as a regular residential waste collection service. The Roberts' Rules (modified) procedures that had been used by the task force for review of its report were suspended for this discussion, although the matter did overlap with Topic C - 5 about the size and volume of brush to be collected.

Discussion. The issue of offering yard waste collection as a separate service that is beyond regular residential waste collection services was thoroughly discussed. Advocates stated that roughly 30% of their customers use curbside yard waste collection services, since many homeowners have lawn services or compost/mulch their grass clippings. Why should all waste collection customers pay for yard waste collection when only about a third uses it. It is grossly unfair to charge all customers for the cost of yard waste collection. Moreover, if the collection of yard waste was tailored to the users of the services, then collection companies could cut back on routes and reduce air emissions.

Q: Do other haulers have the same percent of customers who do not use the yard waste collection service?

A: Most collectors responded that about 30% of their customers use the service on average; it is unbalanced usage based on the neighborhoods—some have more use and others less.

Q: Does the task force have to decide this issue or is it a waste industry concern?

A: Yes, the waste industry has to decide, no one vendor can do this alone. The waste industry needs the task force's endorsement to make the changes happen. The County Code, Chapter 109 may need to be changed if collectors have the option of not offering yard waste collection.

Advocates stated it costs \$700-\$1000 per day to put a truck on the road. The task force needs to look at the costs of collecting yard waste. Does it make sense to continue yard waste collection as part of regular residential waste collection services?

Another task force member indicated that at previous meetings the task force had discussed this issue and made determinations.

Q: Does the task force want to revisit the topic again?

A: We are addressing it out of turn again. Perhaps the topic was not thoroughly addressed previously to include these specific issues.

The discussion continued.

Q: A collector's concern is that Chapter 109 would need to be changed to free collectors from the requirement to collect some of the larger amounts of yard waste separately?

A: No, not really, since the Code already allows collectors to charge for extra services beyond a minimum set out amounts (i.e. greater than 6 bags of yard waste per collection day per customer).

It is a tightly competitive market and if some collectors put additional costs on the rate to collect yard waste, customers will go to other collectors.

Many collection companies already charge extra for yard waste above a certain limit. The companies want to be able to unilaterally set their limits above the county code designated minimums.

Other members of the task force stated differing opinions about the issue. Many industries spread their operating costs across all their customers; this is a standard business practice.

The Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC) had met and discussed this issue recently. The costs of doing business are just that and should be included in the base fee for services. Collectors can charge extra for large amounts of yard waste beyond the code designated minimums. EQAC did not support any change to current methods of yard waste collection.

Loudoun Composting may be sold. Where will the county compost yard waste when that facility is gone? If Loudoun Composting goes away, maybe this task force should recommend finding another place to do composting in the county.

Q: Why can we not have a composting facility in the county?

A: A few years ago, the Solid Waste Program tried to find a suitable site for composting in the county, but one could not be appropriately identified and zoned.

Prince William County has a composting facility that Fairfax County uses as part of the waste exchange agreement, whereby they bring us trash to process at the waste-to-energy facility and we send leaves and yard waste to compost at their Balls Ford Road facility.

Q: What is the impact on our recycling program, if we removed yard waste?

A: About 20% of the total amount of recycled material is yard waste. About 7%-8% of the total waste stream is yard waste. We would reduce the county's recycling rate by 7-8% if we did not recycle yard debris, reducing the overall recycling rate in the county to around 26-27%, only slightly above the State's mandated rate of 25%.

County staff further noted that the Fairfax County Solid Waste Management Plan, which was adopted in May, 2004 and submitted to the state, identified yard waste recycling as a key

strategy in the overall plan for the next 20 years. If we do not require separate collection and recycling of yard waste, then the county will need to amend the plan.

County staff also mentioned that if yard waste is mixed with regular trash and processed at the waste-to-energy facility, the yard waste will take capacity needed to process increasing amounts of trash as well as produce more NOX, which we cannot afford as a community located within a severe ozone non-attainment area.

Q: Is this a Chapter 109 issue? If yard waste collection is optional, must we change the code?

A: Chapter 109 can be amended.

Notwithstanding what is in the code about separate collection, customers can still choose not to participate and they do.

Q: Could collectors track the customers who generate yard waste and charge them higher prices for the yard waste collection?

A: Yes, but unless all collectors do that, customers will choose another company that charges less.

It would be hard to operationalize a program where some customers pay and some do not pay for yard waste collection. Trucks would already be in the neighborhoods to collect from customers who pay for yard waste collection, so little reduction in costs for the collectors would be realized. Further, the cost to each household using the service would go up so that as the cost increased, more customers would elect to hide their yard waste in the regular trash. Collectors would become recycling cops and no one wants that.

Throughout its work this year the task force had championed the principle that the free market system is the best way to ensure quality service and enforce standards. It seems inconsistent at this time to control the very market forces that we have praised earlier.

One member offered the analogy that the cost of collecting recycling materials is spread among all customers, not just those customers who choose to recycle. Spreading the cost of service among all customers is a standard business practice.

Recommendation. Task force members were asked if they wished to make a recommendation different than what is already contained in the report about this issue. There was consensus among the members that there should be no change to the report at this time. However, there was a commitment from county staff to continue to discuss this emerging issue at Collectors' Meetings.

There were no additional changes to the Customer Service chapter of the report.

#### **Chapter 4 Communications**

The review of Chapter 4 of the report proceeded using the modified Roberts Rules that were used in previous meetings.

Line 838 -- Mr. Tyler moved to add "homeowners associations" after collection companies. Mr. Liberty seconded the motion and it passed unanimously

The tense of the document needs to be consistent throughout.

Line 874 – An administrative recommendation was made to change good to “quality” customer service standards throughout document.

Line 896 -- Mr. Clark moved and Ms. Carr seconded the motion to change the word could to “should.” The motion passed unanimously.

Line 897 -- Mr. Lecos moved to request staff to add wording at that line to indicate that the county’s role in communication should increase compliance and reduce need for enforcement actions. Ms. Doughty seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Line 898 -- A motion by Ms. Blois to add the words “through multiple communication channels” to the end of the bullet. The motion was seconded by Mr. Lecos and approved unanimously following discussion.

Line 900 – A motion by Mr. Lecos to delete lines 900 and 901 was seconded by Ms. Doughty and unanimously approved.

Line 902 -- A motion to link lines 902 and 904 was made by Ms. Blois and seconded by Mr. Lecos. It passed unanimously.

Line 904 – A general comment was made that all the enhancements are web-based ones and there are other ways to communicate with residents such as newspapers, paid radio/TV ad, county’s cable channel, PSAs, etc.

Line 906 – Do links to websites put small companies at a disadvantage if they do not have a website? No, that is a business decision. The report should remain unchanged.

Line 918 – An administrative clarification was made to add the words “home page” after County website.

Line 924 – A motion was made by Ms. Blois and seconded by Mr. Lecos to amend Comm -1-3 to read “through multiple communication channels.” It passed unanimously.

Line 927 – Mr. Lecos moved and Mr. Hasle seconded to add Comm 1-4 recommendation that reads, “Use Channel 16 to communicate information related to the solid waste management program.” The motion passed unanimously.

Line 929 – Mr. Tyler moved and Mr. Liberty seconded a recommendation that reads, “Add a link from the Community Association Manual to the Trash and Recycling webpage.” The motion was unanimously approved. Since the link is between pages already on Fairfax County’s website, staff will make this happen immediately.

Line 941- Mr. Hasle moved and Mr. Liberty seconded deleting the word quarterly. The motion was unanimously approved.

Line 947 – Mr. Lecos moved and Ms. Carr seconded the motion to delete the line entirely.

Line 948 – an administrative change should be made throughout the report to refer consistently to the quality customer service standards.

A motion was made by Mr. Lecos and seconded by Mr. Mehan to communicate the companies’ participation in the quality customer service standards to their customers. The motion was unanimously approved.

Line 957 – Mr. Lecos moved and Ms. Roit seconded to delete lines 957 – 959. It was approved unanimously.

Line 969 – Mr. Liberty moved and Mr. Lecos seconded to change the work critical to “essential” and delete the next two sentences (lines 969-971). It was unanimously approved.

Line 981 – Mr. Clark moved and Ms. Roit seconded a motion to insert a new bullet at line 981 that read, “Reference the Quality Customer Service Standards in their collection agreements/contracts.” The motion passed unanimously.

Line 982 – Mr. Lecos moved and Ms. Carr second a motion to delete lines 982 -984.

The next meeting of the task force will be on March 29 to deal with the remaining Operations issues. Staff was asked to include a list of issues to be discussed when sending the next meeting announcement.

The task force added another meeting for April 12 to review/approve the final organization, issues discussion and presentation of the report. The review team will meet prior to the April 12 meeting and make their recommended changes to the report so that it reads well.

At the April 29 meeting, the task force will review and approve the final report to be presented to the Board of Supervisors on May 23 at 10:15 a.m.

On May 2, the annual Solid Waste Citizens Advisory Committee meeting will be held and one of the major topics will be the SWTF report. Task force members are invited to the meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the Government Center, Room 2/3.

Task force members asked for an updated timeline for these meetings for planning purposes.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40.

**Next meeting:** March 29, 2005, Group Decision Support Center, 7:00 p.m.

# **SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT TASK FORCE REPORT FROM MARCH 15TH MEETING: COMMUNICATIONS**

**Thursday, March 15, 2005**

**SWMTF DRAFT REPORT: Communications..... 3**

## SWMTF DRAFT REPORT

### Chapter 4 Communications

832

Communication is a fundamental element of much of the discussion and recommendations made in other chapters of this report regarding environmental, customer service, and operational issues. Central to the customer service standards discussion was the need for collection companies to have written standards to provide to their customers about how they intended to perform collection services. Some of the enhancements in the environmental chapter dealt with establishing better communications among the county, collection companies and county residents.

**PASSED**

**Motion: Clark Second: Paul**

**Line 838: ... companies, HOAs, and county residents.**

**EDITORIAL NOTE: Consistency in verb -- past tense.**

839

Significantly, communication is a necessary component of the free market, competitive economy in the county, since residents must know their options when choosing a residential waste collection company or any service in order to make a good choice. In the final analysis, full and forthright communication is necessary for competition to support good customer service. Informed and educated consumers are the surest way to sustain and enhance a world-class integrated waste management system such as we have in Fairfax County.

846

Communication about solid waste issues occurs in many different ways in Fairfax County. Clear, effective communication is desired by all parties involved with this report. Since many of the customer service and operational issues could be attributable to breakdowns in communication, the task force considered incorporating discussions about communication within other chapters of this report. However, as the process evolved, it became clearer to the members that resolving communication issues and establishing reasonable expectations were pivotal to resolving the current and future issues. Because of its key importance, the task force agreed that the ideas about improving communication warranted a separate chapter for discussion and recommendations.

856

Specific recommendations contained in other chapters will not be re-addressed here, but additional suggestions and recommendations will be made about the roles of various stakeholders in improving communications to ensure that satisfactory strides are made toward resolving the issues presented to the task force. By definition improving communications means communicating more frequently and in more effective ways.

#### **County's Role in Communication (COMM-1)**

863

Discussion. Fairfax County has traditionally taken the lead role in providing overarching communication to the general public regarding solid waste policies and procedures within the county. The county works with collection companies and other groups to develop appropriate messages about existing and new countywide programs such as the expansion of curbside recycling. Staff prepares brochures and flyers to educate residents and businesses about recycled materials required for collection and how to

869

prepare the materials correctly for recycling. These communication materials are made available to collectors to distribute to their customers. County staff continues to expand the information maintained on its website to help residents understand the complexities and requirements of the integrated waste management system in Fairfax County. Also the county's website will become a focal point for keeping the list of collection companies that adopt the Quality Customer Service Standards, developed as part of the task force's work.

Editorial Note: Marilyn



874: Quality Customer Service standards -- consistent terminology

876

Moreover, the county's website already contains important information for collection companies and residents and is updated frequently. However, the information regarding solid waste is difficult to find when using the county's home page. The task force believes that the Subject Areas of the website (shown on the far right side of the website) should contain the subject heading Trash and Recycling, in order to make the subject matter more readily accessible. The current website requires users to know that the subject matter falls under Public Works and Utilities or Environment, which is cumbersome.

884

The frequent updating of information on this web site is also critical and county staff has indicated they provide updates weekly to this site. The task force also supports the county's continued role in maintaining the web based information on solid waste, including providing links to collection companies operating in the county. While staff has noted that web administrators currently prohibit such links, these companies have obtained permits from the county to collect waste, and sign contracts with the county to deliver waste. Allowing links to collection company web sites would provide another means of facilitating communication to residents and businesses of the policies and procedures that individual companies utilize.

893

The task force agreed that the county is not expected to become the customer service interface between collection companies and their customers, however, the county's communication methods are well established and should incorporate features of how to reach collection companies. The county's role in improving communication could extend to:

**PASSED**

**Move: Clark Second: Joan**

**896: County's role in improving communication should (change from could)**

898

Coordinating future county-wide communications regarding, environmental, customer service, and operations issues.

**PASSED**

**Move: Marilyn Second: Bill**

**Link line 902 and 904 to say the intent to provide information on Customer Service Standards**

**AND**

**Expand 898 to say, "through multiple communication channels."**

900

Continuing its regulatory enforcement role to ensure that collectors are aware of, and comply with the county code.

**PASSED**

**MOVE: Bill Second: Joyce**

**Line 900: Remove this (the county already does this) AND change wording on line 897 to reflect the intent of using communications strategies to improve compliance**

**"improve compliance, reduce the need for enforcement, etc. "**

902

Providing the general public information about collectors' Customer Service Standards.

904

Enhancing its website to further educate the public Linking to the "Quality Customer Service Standards" developed by the collection companies.

SEE ABOVE RE 902 & 904

906

Linking to those collectors who request to have their websites linked to the County site.

908

Maintaining a data base of zip codes served by collection companies that will assist residents who wish to find a collector, and placing the information on the website or other accessible location for residents.

911

Communicate with collectors, doing so more frequently during emergencies, to facilitate recovery from disasters or emergencies. Also, supporting a voluntary service whereby collection companies subscribe to the county's emergency alert system. The system could keep collectors informed about weather and other events that activate the alert system.

### **COMM 1 Recommendations**

918

COMM-1-1. The task force recommends that the County's Website be modified to reflect a new subject area, titled, Trash and Recycling, which would directly connect users to existing information more expeditiously.

PASSED

Move: Bill Second:

Line 918: Specify "on the county website home page"

921

COMM-1-2. The task force recommends that a methodology be developed to allow web-page links from the county's solid waste website to collection companies that are permitted to operate in the county.

924

COMM-1-3. That county staff continue to take the lead role in disseminating information about county policies and procedures regarding solid waste and recycling, including frequent updates of information on county operated web-sites.

PASSED

MOVE: Marilyn Second:

924 "...recycling, through multiple communication channels, ...

PASSED

MOVE: Bill Second: John

Add Comm 1-4: Utilize Channel 16 to communicate information on solid waste.

PASSED

MOVE: Clark Second: Paul

Add Comm 1-5: Recommend a link from county solid waste web site to HOA Community Association Manual

### **Collectors' Role in Communication (COMM-2)**

932

Traditionally, solid waste collectors have communicated with customers differently based upon their own policies and procedures. Some companies only provide written information to new customers, while others

provide written policies and procedures more frequently. Usually, customer communication comes to the collector in the form of a question or complaint, and it is paramount that collection companies have the equipment and personnel in place to adequately answer questions and inquiries from their

938

customer base. Collectors will be encouraged to provide the level of communication necessary in the Quality Customer Service Standards, including more frequent communications with customers. There are many avenues that collectors can use in communication such as, communicating to customers in quarterly invoices, developing web-based information, or partnering with county staff in routine correspondence. The task force agreed that the preferred manner to address issues, especially customer service issues, would be to have customers and their collection companies resolve the issues without outside intervention.

**PASSED**

**MOVE: John Second: Paul**

**941: Strike the word "quarterly"**

946

Communications strategies for the collectors could include:

947

Maintain customer service awareness.

**PASSED**

**Move: Bill Second: Joan**

**Strike line 947**

948

Adopt and adhere to the customer service standards advocated by the task force in conjunction with collection companies.

**PASSED**

**Move: Bill Second: Conrad**

**948: consistent: Qual Cust Service Stds and "communicate the companies' participation to their customers"**

950

Be accessible by telephone, email, or other methods.

951

Be responsive to the concerns of customers by addressing service issues quickly.

953

Communicate more frequently with their customers.

964

Subscribe to the county emergency alert system so the collectors will know when emergency situations activate the system.

## **COMM 2 Recommendations**

967

COMM-2-1. Collection companies are encouraged to adopt the Quality Customer Service Standards and comply with or exceed the customer service expectations addressed by the standards.

**PASSED**

**Move: Bill Second: Sheila**

Delete 967/Comm 2-1

### **Customer's Role in Communication (COMM-3)**

961

Customers are also involved in communication and they commonly communicate openly when they perceive something in the solid waste process has gone wrong. Their communication can range from missed curbside collections to complaints of speeding trucks in neighborhoods. Sometimes there is a communication gap at the customers' level, because they do not understand the policies/procedures or regulatory issues associated with solid waste. Occasionally, customers phoning the county do not even have the information about who their service provider is. The outreach developed by the county and collectors' is an important element necessary to the customer. Two-way communication is critical. Customers must understand the limitations of waste collection and disposal, coupled with the collectors' understanding of customer needs. A balance is desired, but it is recognized that it is not easily achieved. Some ways the customers can improve communications are to:

**PASSED**

**MOVE: Paul Liberty Second: Bill**

**Line 969 change "critical" to "essential"**

**Line 969 strike sentence "Customers must"**

**Line 970 strike sentence "A balance is"**

973

Read and comply with guidance provided by the county or the collection company regarding proper curbside set-out of waste and recycling materials.

975

Notify their collection company when service problems arise and notify the county only if resolution does not occur.

977

Choose a collection company that best fits with their needs, including their communication expectations.

979

Access county staff and/or the Board of Supervisors to state their concerns if countywide policy changes are necessary.

**PASSED**

**Move: Clark Second: Sheila**

**ADD NEW BULLET AT 981: HOAS are urged to include a reference to the Qual Cust Stds in their collection agreements**

982

All stakeholders have a role to play in communication. If each of the components of the communication triangle conforms to its roles in improving communications, then communication will improve along with overall service delivery.

**PASSED**

**Move: Bill Second: Joan**

**Delete 982 - 984**